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ABSTRACT

A speech instructor at Owensboro Community College (Kentucky) found that his switch from the CEDA (Cross Examination Debate Association) speech tournament to the NEDA (National Education Debate Association) speech tournament was beneficial for his students. After the Highland Community College (Kentucky) tournament in January of 1994, the instructor, after years of dedication to the CEDA, began to seriously question the state of CEDA debate. Coaches avoided taking a strong stand against a host of ills, including a persistent violation of the novice eligibility rules, an unresponsive national organization, the employment of nonsensical delivery speeds, incessant brief reading, and counterintuitive argumentation lacking resolutional focus. Since the CEDA stood little chance of reforming, some instructors attended an initial topic selection and planning meeting for the NEDA at Northern Oklahoma College (Tonkawa, Oklahoma). The organization was founded on a number of important standards: (1) lay judges must be used in abundance; (2) a real world delivery style should be embraced by debaters; (3) debate cases and argumentation should focus on the resolution; (4) the novice division should be protected and preserved for truly inexperienced beginners who require a nurturing environment in which to learn the art of debate; and (5) debate topics should be simple enough that any layperson would understand the core intent of the topic selected for debate. The result was that NEDA allowed this instructor's truly novice debaters to compete in a learning-centered environment. (Contains 9 references.) (TB)

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Establishing a New Beginning: Justifying "Our" Move to NEDA

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RUNNING HEAD: NEDA PERSPECTIVE: WHY WE MOVED

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Establishing a New Beginning: Justifying "Our" Move to NEDA.

My involvement with CEDA debate dates back to my freshman year at the University of Southern California (USC). I competed in my first CEDA tournament at Long Beach State University in December of 1979. As an undergraduate, I was repeatedly exposed to the stark difference in delivery style between NDT and CEDA debate formats because USC has always been an active member of both organizations. The speedier NDT delivery style was encouraged to allow debaters to cover a wide array of issues and was, at that time, markedly faster than the rhetorical pace embraced by CEDA debaters. Back then, CEDA debaters were routinely criticized for "dumbing" down the activity through the use of analogies, anecdotes, metaphors, and a limited use of evidence to illustrate and solidify their major arguments. My NDT teammates at USC routinely lampooned our efforts by referring to CEDA as "psuedodebate," while encouraging us to switch to NDT where, they contended, "real debate" reigned supreme.

In 1983, while working on my Master's degree, I founded the UNLV Speech and Debate program and chose to compete exclusively in CEDA. During those years, the number of colleges and universities competing in CEDA nearly doubled as instititutions left the NDT debate circuit in droves (Thomas and Wood, 1993). Unfortunately, as CEDA grew, the organization began to move away from its' original commitment to audience

oriented debate (Howe, 1981; Weiss, 1985). Last year, we decided that Owensboro Community College would cease debating at the end of the 1994 season and work exclusively on individual events competition beginning with the fall of 1995.

Our thinking was changed after hearing Gary Horn, Ferris State, and Larry Underberg, South Dakota, describe their exciting plans for the establishment of a new debate organization, the National Education Debate Association (NEDA), and we decided to adopt a new course of action for the upcoming season. After hearing their presentation at the Spring NDA tournament, we decided to try debating for one more season, a season committed to NEDA's audience centered style of debate. In reviewing the reasons we joined NEDA this essay will focus upon my past experiences with CEDA, the prime characteristics of NEDA, and the benefits our program has experienced since making the switch from CEDA.

Originally, CEDA was established to expand competitive opportunities for those students who lacked extensive high school or collegiate forensics experience (Brownlee, 1991). CEDA was also intended to provide the lay judge with a forum in which to experience debates focusing more rigidly upon the resolution, embracing a more conversational delivery style, and a more moderate use of evidence. During coaching stints at several four year colleges, I began to see CEDA move radically away from that model and devolve into a hodgepodge of competing styles, which varied markedly from

region to region (Horn and Underberg, 1993).

In the Midwest, while at Southwest Missouri State University, I observed debaters who displayed a sophisticated understanding of advanced argumentation theory, the ability to cover the flow quickly, and a fondness for extensive brief reading and evidence "dumping." In the Southeast, at Alabama-Birmingham, my debaters were obsessed with the "need for speed" to respond and clash with any argument offered by the opposing team. This often included totally absurd and counter-intuitive types of argumentation reflecting little relevance to the topic being debated. At that juncture, I began to seriously question where CEDA was going in terms of its commitment to teaching the use of logic, cultivating real world communication skills, and providing opportunities for new program development.

The problems became all the more pronounced when we started a new CEDA program at Owensboro Community College, where there were no high school debate programs within 30 miles of the campus from which to recruit experienced forensics competitors. My students often had a difficult time just grasping basic argumentation theory and debate structure. All too often, we would arrive at CEDA tournaments to find highly experienced debaters competing in the novice division, despite the tightening, on paper, of the eligibility rules by CEDA during the mid-1980's. Our Fall 1991 semester, OCC's fledgling involvement in forensics, was a disaster as our

team failed to post even a .500 record during its first few tournaments, all within novice divisions. During the spring, we experience some success as we won the Novice division at the Illinois Central College CEDA tournament in Peoria, Illinois. But, our team members had an especially difficult time making the transition to competing in open divisions as the program grew and developed. In addition, we had a rough time dealing with the increasingly rapid delivery rates which had now become common among schools competing in the Upper Midwest circuit. A momentous decision loomed for us as time went on: Should we practice speed reading as a means to improvement within the CEDA community or abandon debate completely and focus upon individual events competition as other Kentucky community colleges have done? We were planning to select the latter option when the plans for NEDA were unveiled late last season at Ohio Northern University.

Our decision to leave CEDA centered primarily upon a concern for my students, the character of our traditional circuit (the East Central District), and a strong belief that CEDA was not capable of reforming itself from within. I was very involved in CEDA and served as Southeast regional representative and helped edit the proceeding for the Debate Educator committee during the 1991 CEDA Assessment Conference in St. Paul, Minnesota. It was during that conference that I began to worry about the long-term health of CEDA as an organization designed to promote public forum debate and encourage the involvement of inexperienced students who

sought a first time experience in college debate. There was a very serious division between two competing schools of thought, the "Gameplaying" and the "Advocacy" paradigms of argumentation strategy. In addition, for the first time, I heard coaches openly discuss the unreasonable toll imposed upon their families and careers by the weekend travel commitments involved with the multilayered schedule of CEDA tournaments. It was suggested that a more humane process of travel and tournament scheduling be developed, along with disincentives for squads to travel to more than 5-6 tournaments a semester (Murphy, 1992). This was the summer before I began to actively direct a new forensics program at OCC and the Conference helped open my eyes to the problems CEDA was beginning to experience.

During the OCC programs' first year, we discovered that we were better off competing within the East Central region (Illinois, Indiana, Ohio) , rather than attempting to do battle with the faster and more intense Southeast district squads (Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee). Kentucky debate, at WKU and Transylvania, seemed far more in turn with the persuasive, audience centered style of debate embraced within the East Central district. In addition, we found that CEDA "novice" divisions were not always as advertised. Some coaches felt compelled to hibernate their experienced high school debaters and less skilled college debaters in novice throughout the semester (Withycombe, 1991). This blatant violation of the novice rules most often involved squads which were heavily immersed in the race

for CEDA points (Ulrich, 1991). These teams felt that earning CEDA points was novice division was far more important than providing a "nurturing and educational" environment in which truly inexperienced debaters could learn the basics of debate. This behavior pattern and lapse of ethics infuriated me because it robbed truly inexperienced speakers of a level playing field upon which to compete.

As the OCC program developed, we began to compete in Open divisions at CEDA tournaments with mixed success. The quality of debate helped improve our debaters' grasp of argument theory, but we also often lost rounds simply because of our inability to "cover the spread" laid out by more savvy, experienced teams. Eventually, our debaters began to express a high level of frustration with this state of affairs and some simply quit the activity rather than adapt to the "run and gun" delivery style embraced by other programs.

Trouble was also brewing within the East Central district as coaches began to challenge each other directly concerning the increased use of speed and counterintuitive argumentation. After the Highland Community College tournament in January of 1994, I began to seriously question the state of CEDA debate and decided that these practices needed to be challenged by those of us who manage and direct the activity on a professional level. Coaches needed to take a strong stand against a host of ills plaguing CEDA including: (1) A persistent violation of the novice eligibility rules; (2) An

unresponsive national organization; (3) The employment of nonsensical delivery speeds and incessant brief reading; and (4) Counterintuitive argumentation lacking resolutional focus. After that experience, we began to contemplate a complete refocusing of our efforts toward individual events competition.

Last July, I attended the initial topic selection and planning meeting for NEDA at Northern Oklahoma College in Tonkawa, Oklahoma. The organization was founded upon five basic standards: (1) Lay judges should be utilized in abundance; (2) A real world delivery style should be embraced by our debaters; (3) Debate cases and argumentation should be focused upon the resolution; (4) Novice divisions should be protected and preserved for truly inexperienced beginners who require a nurturing environment in which to learn the art of debate; and (5) Debate topics should be simple enough that any layperson would understand the core intent of the topic selected for debate. Charter member institutions were asked to firmly adhere to and enforce these precepts, while attempting to recruit coaches and schools who were willing to strongly commit to the ideals of NEDA.

Beginning this fall, we began to compete in NEDA. We have experienced numerous benefits from our involvement in this fledgling organization. These advantages include "solvency" for many of the problems we experience din CEDA including: A place to compete in fairly organized and regulated novice divisions; The opportunity to debate in a communicative, real world style of delivery; A de emphasis on the mindless

overuse of evidence and briefs as a substitute for concrete experience and real world analysis to support major arguments; An emphasis on the use of lay judges; Increased interaction between coaches; and debate topics constructed to reflect a simple and direct focus for both debaters, judges, and audience members.

NEDA allowed our truly novice debaters to compete in a supportive tournament environment during their first tournament of the year at Western Illinois University. Both of our teams gained valuable experience and even advanced to early elims before exiting the tournament. Each debater commented about the difficulty of adapting to the varying standards of various lay judges throughout the tournament. From my perspective, their comments helped justify our move to NEDA because in the real world, in which our students must compete, not every audience reflects a uniformly friendly demeanor and not many audiences provide a judging philosophy before each presentation. Similarly, each of the lay judges our debaters encountered, during the first few rounds, shared their personal backgrounds (but no judging philosophy) , left the time keeping to the debaters, and offered extensive and helpful postround critiques focusing upon relevant aspects of participant delivery, argument consistency, topic relevance and demeanor. These judges also shared their personal feelings concerning the issue being debated and how effectively they were persuaded by the arguments provided by each speaker during the round. In NEDA, debaters learn how to deal with the reality of audience diversity and how to adapt to

the needs of the listener. During the time our debaters competed in CEDA their learning was focused upon conforming to the microscopic world of debate terminology and to embrace competitive strategies designed to "not lose" the debate. Our debaters were often discouraged from adopting an oratorical style. in order to feed the "flow" and thus avoid succumbing to the potentially lethal "spread" offered up by the opposing team.

In NEDA, debaters are encouraged to integrate the use of anecdotes and personal experiences in order to generate a more rhetorically compelling sytle of of delivery for the varied lay audiences they will routinely encounter. Some may argue that this forced adaptation produced bad (re: slow, plodding) debate, but we believe that NEDA promotes the development of an argumentation style which will be more richly appreciated in the real world of work, advocacy, competition, and, sometimes, hostile audiences. During the first NEDA tournament, NEDA debaters spoke in front of a wide array of lay professionals including college professors, lawyers, accountants, state legislators, mayors, public school teachers, nurses, doctors, psychologists, and sales managers.

During the fall semester, nearly 40% of all NEDA judges came from the lay ranks and that figure climbed to over 50% during the spring term (Underberg and Norton, 1994). This change is a positive one for coaches and tournament directors because it broadens the spectrum of audience for debate and provides coaches with valuable opportunities to network and interact throughout NEDA tournaments. These networking opportunites

help facilitate planning, heal misunderstandings between coaches, and allow us to get to know one another beyond "the flowpad." Tournament directors also benefited because lay judges are more willing to volunteer their free time when they know that the debaters will work to communicate in a clear and direct manner with them. During the years we hosted a debate division at OCC, we often found it extremely difficult to "sell" debate ballots to erstwhile judges who felt an unreasonable burden to learn a host of debate jargon in addition to dealing with debater terminology, time keeping, flowing, and deciphering nonuser friendly debate ballots. NEDA rounds are much more focused upon the resolution and are intended to promote a more "user friendly" approach for all those who volunteer their time as judges. Finally, if debaters violate that credo and begin to revert to inappropriate behaviors and delivery styles judges are urged to penalize them using the ballot as a mechanism for change (including the options of issuing a double loss or voting Affirmative on topicality prior to the beginning of rebuttals).

The tournament schedule for NEDA is also far more humane as it limits the number of events to a manageable 3 tournaments per semester. During the fall term, we were able to attend three tournaments in the East Central district including contests at WIU, Indiana-Purdue, Indianapolis, and Transylvania in Lexington, Kentucky. Each of these tournaments took less than two days to complete and involved only one nights lodging for those of use dealing with tight budgets. In addition, if squads with larger budgets wanted to attend more events they could simply travel to the Western Region (Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, and Texas) during that same semester.

Overall, our move to NEDA has been an overwhelmingly positive experience. The organization will undoubtedly go through some growing pains as it attempts to expand beyond its current borders. But, as CEDA continues to devolve into an ever fragmented mish-mash of style, form, and substance, NEDA should attract new schools who abandoned the former in order to provide a more learning centered environment for both their new and experienced debaters. NEDA's membership roll already boasts several institutions who abandoned debate years ago, during the collapse of NDT, and have joined our organization in order to seek a more humane and audience centered approach to debate as an intellectual and communication centered activity. Indeed, our own decision to join NEDA was predicated upon a firm belief that our students would more fully develop their spoken, written, and analytical skills through a more "audience centered" form of debate. I believe that NEDA will grow and prosper during the coming years as more small programs, like our own, decide to join ranks with coaches who are committed to improving the listenability and intelligibility of debate for all concerned. By supporting NEDA, they will become an important member within a growing community of concerned educators who feel the time has come to protect and serve academic debate by encouraging the type of argumentation which will perpetuate real audience interest and involvement.

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